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Viewing cable 08BOGOTA4028, COLOMBIAN MILITARY COMMANDER MONTTOYA RESIGNS,

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BOGOTA4028	2008-11-06 18:33	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Bogota

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.elespectador.com/noticia-clave-252925-colombia-wikileaks>

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ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 061833Z NOV 08
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5418
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SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN MILITARY COMMANDER MONTTOYA RESIGNS,
GENERAL GONZALEZ PENA NAMED AS REPLACEMENT

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer. Reason: 1.4(b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) Colombian Army Commanding General Mario Montoya Uribe resigned his post on November 4. Montoya stepped down less than a week after President Alvaro Uribe's dismissal of 27 military officers for their roles in the disappearance and subsequent murders of young men from Soacha and Antioquia. Montoya has been dogged in recent years by allegations of his involvement in human rights abuses. Later on November 4, Uribe named Major General Oscar Enrique Gonzalez Pena--considered Montoya's "protege"--to the post. Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos told us Montoya personally convinced Uribe to appoint Gonzalez. Human rights groups have voiced concerns that extrajudicial killings were committed under Gonzalez' watch while commander of the 4th brigade. END SUMMARY.

GENERAL MONTOYA RESIGNS AS COLAR COMMANDER

¶2. (U) On November 4, Colombian Army Commanding General Mario Montoya Uribe resigned his post. Montoya stepped down less than a week after President Uribe's dismissal of 27 military officers--including two division and three brigade commanders--for their roles in the disappearance and subsequent murders of young men from Soacha and Antioquia. Montoya had been the subject of multiple human rights complaints during his tenure, including alleged abuses committed in Medellin's poorer neighborhoods during Operation Orion, collusion with paramilitaries, and demanding "body count" as a measure of operational success.

¶3. (U) Colombian press reported statements by Senator Patrick Leahy calling Montoya's departure a "long overdue and positive step." Leahy said Montoya "shares responsibility for widespread and systematic abuses by the Colombian military." Montoya's recent military successes include the rescue of hostages in Operation Jaque. Some believed he would be a likely successor to Armed Forces Commander General Freddy Padilla de Leon.

PRESIDENT NAMES GONZALEZ PENA AS REPLACEMENT

¶4. (U) Later on November 4, President Uribe announced at a press conference with General Freddy Padilla and Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos that Major General Oscar Enrique Gonzalez Pena, current commander of the Caribbean Joint Command, would replace Montoya as Commanding General of the Colombian Army. Uribe said Gonzalez' appointment leaves the Army in "good hands," highlighting his significant operational successes. Gonzalez Pena followed Montoya as commander of the 4th Brigade from December 2003 to July 2005, and then became commander of the 7th Division in 2005.

¶5. (U) Gonzalez was responsible for the operation that led to the death of "Martin Caballero," the former head of the FARC's 37th Front, in September of last year. Human rights groups publicly criticized Gonzalez' appointment for his close association with Montoya, and voiced concerns regarding 45 alleged extrajudicial killings committed by the 4th Brigade during his command. El Tiempo reported that Montoya selected Gonzalez as 'best commander in the country' during his tenure as 4th Brigade commander because his unit reported the most combat kills---857.

GONZALEZ, MONTOYA'S PROTEGE

¶6. (S) MOD Santos told the Ambassador that Montoya--who has a close relationship with Uribe--persuaded the President to appoint Gonzalez as his replacement. Santos pushed back, but Uribe decided to proceed with the appointment. Santos subsequently met with Gonzalez who assured him that he was "clean" on all fronts. Vice Ministers Pinzon and Jaramillo told us separately that Gonzalez is Montoya's protege, and could be an obstacle to further improvements on human rights. Still, Pinzon and Jaramillo stressed Santos' commitment to human rights, and voiced confidence that they could manage

Gonzalez.
BROWNFIELD

=====CABLE ENDS=====